



The Committee on Urban Design and Environment (CUDE) met at 11:30 AM on Thursday, April 15, 2010 in Room 320 City Hall, Rochester, MN.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Nora Dooley, Gail Eadie, Mark Engel, Sandi Goslee, Mark Jasmin, Jim Judisch, Stephan Lewis, Lindsey Meek, Roger Nelson, Dave Peterson, Brian Smidt, Terry Spaeth, Susan Strandberg, Jean Weathers-Lowin

MEMBERS ABSENT

Dick Abraham

OTHERS PRESENT

Jon Eckhoff, John Harford, Doug Knott, Barry Skolnick, Michael Wojcik

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

The meeting was called to order at 11:35. Motion by Ms. Dooley, second by Mr. Petersen to approve the March minutes; unanimous approval.

Notes of Appreciation

None

Referral Notices

Shoppes on 2nd – will be discussed later in the meeting

NEW BUSINESS

Rochester Downtown Alliance – Jon Eckhoff

Mr. Eckhoff gave a brief history of the RDA. The group is trying to create a cohesive brand for our downtown: "The place to be!" Mr. Eckhoff is also involved in the Downtown Master Plan process. A brief bio was presented.

Mr. Eckhoff stated that the opportunities downtown are huge because so many people clear out after a certain hour. He sees CUDE as having a role in the Downtown Master Plan project and in getting some teeth into the Downtown's design guidelines.

Mr. Eckhoff described the RDA's Façade Improvement Program and an interest buy-down program to encourage businesses to move and stay downtown. He described the design review group and process the RDA is implementing. Mr. Lewis and Ms. Strandberg stressed importance of graphic examples to the success of these design guidelines. Mr. Eckhoff responded that might be a good first project for CUDE to work on with them; do research on great examples. Mr. Jasmin commented on the need to get these concepts into City ordinances so they can be enforced.

Ms. Dooley asked why landscaping isn't included in the RDA's Façade Improvement Program. Mr. Eckhoff said it's because landscape isn't considered to be "real property" for tax abatement purposes. Mr. Lewis asked how best to get streetscape improvements into the downtown. Mr. Eckhoff said that's up to Rochester Public Works and Park & Rec. Mr. Knott commented that it will come up with street reconstruction and redevelopment projects. Mr. Eckhoff said he thinks there will be more public/private partnerships.

Mr. Petersen asked how Mr. Eckhoff saw the improvement of the interface between RDA and CUDE. Mr. Eckhoff responded that he's heard good stuff from CUDE and, as a facilitator, he would welcome technical viewpoints.

Mr. Knott asked for feedback from CUDE members on the last Master Plan open house. He appreciated the turnout from members.

OLD BUSINESS

Sign Ordinance Update – John Harford

Mr. Harford said that the City Council has opted to not do anything with dynamic signs except as they apply to schools, churches, and billboards. Mr. Knott commented that the Downtown Master Plan committee has discussed having different sign regulations based on districts, streets, and pedestrian vs. auto orientation.

Mr. Harford said he'd like input on three items:

Impact of digital signs on residential areas

The zoning table that lays out sign sizes – reduce C&D size signs to 450 square feet as no one builds 600 square foot signs

Business center signage like that at Shoppes on Maine – no free standing signs on interior of project but lumps them onto one sign structure on the perimeter. A signage master plan would be required with the incentive that while the signage is lumped in one spot, a greater square footage of it is allowed. This would include some landscaping requirements. Ms. Dooley asked to consider requiring this for redevelopment or remodeling as well – not just new construction.

OTHER BUSINESS

Shoppes on 2nd – John Harford

The plan that was presented to CUDE a couple of years ago did not work out financially. A new site design with a hotel, separate restaurant, and separate retail is now being considered. The hotel is 4 stories high, while the restaurant and retail will be one story with a higher parapet. The buildings do not come up to the lot line on some sides. The newly provided landscape plan has exterior landscaping, but none on the interior parking area.

Mr. Harford said that the City Planning and Zoning Commission recommended denial of this project, partly due to some legal concerns of the City Attorney. At that hearing, no landscaping plan had been submitted, so the CPZC wanted denial of the project.

Ms. Meek asked if the parking concerns by Miracle Mile had been resolved. Mr. Harford said that there is more parking onsite than is required by ordinance.

Ms. Eadie stated that if the proposal meets the zoning requirements, how can it be denied? Mr. Jasmin sees the issue as a process disconnect as the ordinances do not yet incorporate the guidelines of the newly adopted Second Street Corridor Plan.

Mr. Spaeth/Mr. Petersen made motion to draft letter to Council regarding this proposal. The letter should recognize the concerns expressed about the disconnect between the plan and the ordinance as it applies to this proposal. Because this came to CUDE's attention at such a late date, Ms. Meeks agreed to draft a letter which the group will review and edit via e-mail. A final draft consolidating all concerns expressed today will be placed on CUDE letterhead and sent to the City Council and Mayor. Unanimous support to take this action.

Adjourn – 1:20. Next meeting will be at 11:30 on May 20th in Room 320 City Hall.